

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3763

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, SA, JO, SY, US

SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON SAUDI LETTERS OF OFFER

REF: STATE 039732

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL.

2. THE 20TH INFANTRY BRIGADE IS PRESENTLY STATIONED IN SOUTHWESTERN SYRIA, GENERALLY NORTH OF DERA'A ALONG THE DAMASCUS-AMMAN HIGHWAY. THE 20TH BRIGADE PRESENTLY CONSISTS OF TWO INFANTRY BATTALIONS, A LIGHT ARMORED BATTALION (PANHARD) AND AN AIRBORNE INFANTRY BATTALION. ARTILLERY SUPPORT FOR THE BRIGADE CONSISTS OF THREE 105MM HOWITZER BATTERIES AND ONE 155MM BATTERY. ADDITIONALLY, TWO BATTERIES OF 40MM AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY AND A SPECIAL FORCES COMPANY ARE ATTACHED. THE 20TH BRIGADE'S CURRENT STRENGTH IS ESTIMATED AT 5,000 INCLUDING ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT UNITS.

3. THE 11TH INFANTRY BRIGADE IS PRESENTLY STATIONED IN WEST-CENTRAL JORDAN, WITH ITS HEADQUARTERS AT AL-KARAK. ITS SUBORDINATE UNITS ARE PRESUMED TO BE STATIONED IN THE SAME GENERAL VICINTY. IT PRESENT-

LY CONSISTS OF ITS THREE NORMALLY SUBORDINATE INFANTRY BATTALIONS, REINFORCED, WITH THE HEADQUARTERS ELEMENT AND TWO COMPANIES OF A

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TANK BATTALION (M41). ARTILLERY SUPPORT FOR THE 11TH BRIGADE

CONSISTS OF TWO BATTERIES OF 105MM HOWITZERS, TWO BATTERIES OF 155MM HOWITZERS AND POSSIBLY A 4.2 IN MORTAR BATTERY. AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY, AND THERE ARE TWO SPECIAL FORCES AND TWO RECONNAISSANCE COMPANIES ATTACHED TO THE BRIGADE. THE BRIGADE'S CURRENT STRENGTH IS ESTIMATED AT 5500-7000, INCLUDING SUPPORT UNITS.

4. COMMAND AND CONTROL: DESPITE THE FACT THAT THESE FORCES ARE NOMINALLY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THEIR HOST MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, ACTUAL COMMAND AUTHORITY IS RETAINED BY THE SAUDI MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AT RIYADH. ACCORDING TO MIN DEF STAFF OFFICERS, NEITHER BRIGADE TAKES ANY ACTION WITHOUT THE SPECIFIC APPROVAL OF THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT.

THE MAJOR PORTION OF SUPPLY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR BOTH BRIGADES, INCLUDING MONTHLY PAY OF THE TROOPS, IS PROVIDED THROUGH THE SAUDI ARMY NORTHERN AREA COMMAND AT TABUK.

5. JOINT PLANNING BETWEEN THE SAUDI BRIGADES AND THEIR HOST ARMIES IS

ASSUMED. WE DEFER TO DAMASCUS AND AMMAN ON THE NATURE AND DEGREE AND ON SECTORS AND OBJECTIVES, FOR LACK OF SPECIFIC INFORMATION HERE. WE CAN POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT WHEN THE SAUDI TRAINING EXERCISE TOOK PLACE IN SYRIA IN NOVEMBER 1975, THERE WAS NO INDICATION OF PARTICIPATION OR JOINT PLANNING WITH THE SYRIANS. THE EXERCISE CONSISTED SOLELY OF THE SAUDI BRIGADE SUPPORTED BY SAUDI AIRCRAFT OPERATING FROM JORDAN.

6. ROLES. THE PRIMARY REASON FOR THE DEPLOYMENT OF THESE SAUDI FORCES IN SYRIA AND JORDAN IS POLITICAL, RATHER THAN MILITARY. THEIR PRESENCE IS A GESTURE ON THE PART OF THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT TO DEMONSTRATE ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ARAB CAUSE, AND TO ASSIST IN MAINTAINING LEVERAGE ON SYRIA AND JORDAN. CONSIDERING THE CAPABILITIES OF THE UNITS INVOLVED, HOWEVER, IT IS A LIMITED COMMITMENT TO THE ARAB CAUSE, AND TO ASSIST IN MAINTAINING LEVERAGE ON SYRIA AND JORDAN. CONSIDERING THE CAPABILITIES OF THE UNITS INVOLVED

, HOWEVER, IT IS A LIMITED COMMITMENT. THE SAUDIS HAVE TWO NEW AND REASONABLY EFFECTIVE ARMOR BATTALIONS MANNED WITH FRENCH AMX-30 TANKS AT TABUK. THESE HAVE NOT BEEN COMMITTED TO THE FRONT, NOR HAVE ANY OF THE TEN AVAILABLE HAWK AIR DEFENSE BATTERIES. THIS HAS LEFT THE OUT-OF-COUNTRY UNITS LIMITED TO INFANTRY SUPPORTED BY A RELATIVELY

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FEW OLDER TANKS AND ARMORED CARS, AND WITH A WEAK AIR DEFENCE CAPABILITY. FROM AN OPERATIONAL STANDPOINT, THE SAUDI BRIGADES WOULD REINFORCE THEIR HOST ARMIES IN TIME OF ALL-OUT WAR BETWEEN THE ARAB NATIONS AND ISRAEL, BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL THE JORDANIANS AND SYRIANS CONSIDER THEM SIGNIFICANT ASSETS, OR WOULD PLACE MUCH RELIANCE UPON THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR LIMITED CAPABILITIES. DESPITE TRAINING RECEIVED

FROM THEIR HOST ARMIES, AND THE RECENT EXERCISES, THE FACTORS OF

POOR LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLINE, AND WEAK COMMAND AND CONTROL AND LOGISTICS, MITIGATE AGAINST THESE OR OTHER SAUDI ARMY ELEMENTS BEING A VIABLE FORCE AGAINST A SOPHISTICATED ENEMY SUCH AS ISRAEL FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

7. AS TO THE UNITS TO BE MECHANIZED, THE SAUDI MINISTRY OF DEFENSE HAS STATED DEFINITELY THAT THE 8TH INFANTRY BRIGADE AT TABUK WILL BE ONE OF THE TWO BRIGADES MECHANIZED INITIALLY. THE OTHER BRIGADE IS SUBJECT TO QUESTION. COMMENTS BY MIDDLE-LEVEL MIN DEF STAFF OFFICERS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE 10TH BRIGADE AT KHAMIS MUSHAYT, IN SOUTHWEST SAUDI ARABIA, WILL NOT BE MODERNIZED IMMEDIATELY, LEAVING ONE OF THE TWO OUT-OF-COUNTRY BRIGADES AS THE ALTERNATIVES. THIS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED EITHER BY BRINGING BACK INDIVIDUAL INFANTRY BATTALIONS FOR MECHANIZATION AND TRAINING, AND THEN RETURNING THEM, OR BY RETURNING THE ENTIRE BRIGADE. IF THE SAUDIS WANTED TO PULL OUT EITHER BRIGADE, BRINGING IT BACK FOR UPGRADING WOULD BE A POLITICALLY VIABLE WAY OF REMOVING IT, AND THERE IS SOME INDICATION THE SAUDIS DO IN FACT WANT TO WITHDRAW BOTH UNITS FROM THE CONFRONTATION STATES. THE PLANNING FOR NEW MILITARY CANTONEMENTS POINTS TO THE EVENTUAL LOCATION OF ALL SEVEN EXISTING AND PLANNED BRIGADES (FOUR MECH., TWO ARMOR AND ONE AIRBORNE) WITHIN SAUDI TERRITORY: TWO AT KHAMIS MUSHAYT-SHARURA, TWO AT TABUK AND THREE AT AL-BATIN. CONSTRUCTION OF FACILITIES FOR AN ADDITIONAL BRIGADE EACH AT TABUK AND KHAMIS MUSHAYT AND FOR TWO MORE AT AL-BATIN HAS BEEN REQUESTED BY THE SAUDI MIN DEF. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THE SAUDIS PLAN TO MOVE BRIGADES NOW IN SAUDI ARABIA TO SYRIA OR JORDAN ONCE MECHANIZATION IS COMPLETE.

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